

THE WALKING TOUR

Your tour begins at the Port Chilkoot Dock on Beach Road and ends a block away.

1 As you walk up Portage Street, the first building on the right (painted red) was the Fort's signal office where cabled messages in Morse code were sent to and from "the outside," (Seattle).

2 As you continue uphill, you will pass the homes of "Soapsuds Alley", on your left. Wives of noncommissioned officers living here took in the officers' laundry, giving their neighborhood its nickname.

3 Across the street, the long white building was the Fort Commissary that included a lead lined cooler.

4 Continuing up to the Parade Ground, notice a stone foundation: all that remains of a Company barracks building that burned in 1981. It was the "twin" of the adjacent building still standing.

For visitor information:
HAINES VISITOR BUREAU
 P.O. Box 530
 Haines, AK 99827
 Telephone: 907-766-2234
 Fax: 907-766-3155
 Toll Free: 1-800-458-3579
 Email: hcvb@haines.ak.us
 Web: www.haines.ak.us



Post exchange bar.

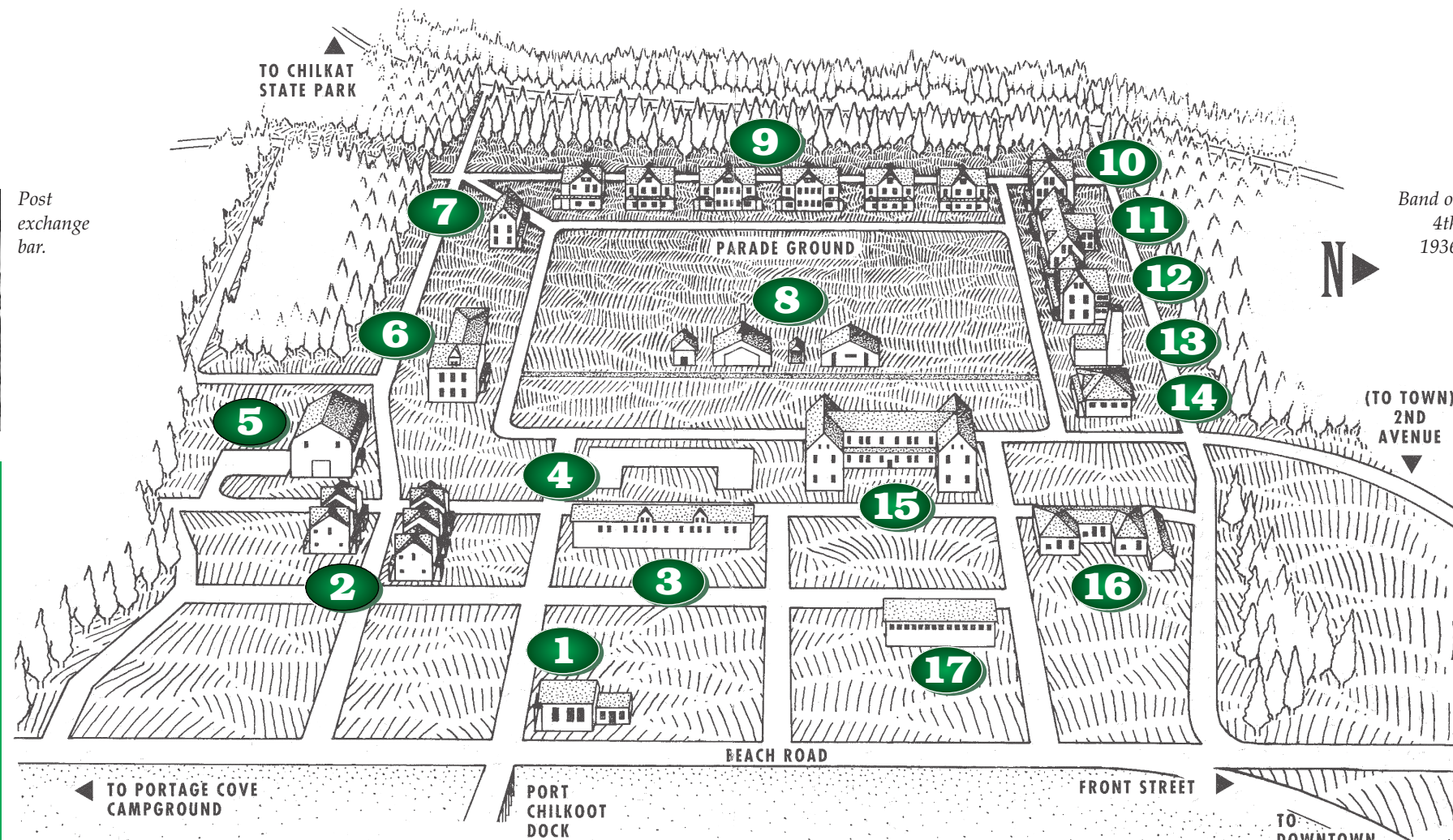
5 The large, brown barn-like structure on your left is the Chilkat Center for the Arts. Built in 1890 as a cannery and warehouse, it was moved to its present site in 1919 and was converted into the Fort's education and recreation hall. It was renovated in 1967, upgraded in 1980 and now serves as the community's 350 seat theater for numerous plays, concerts, and other functions.

6 The first large, white building on the left, facing the Parade Grounds, is Alaska Indian Arts. This originally was the Fort Hospital which was staffed with two doctors at all times. Those physicians were also allowed to accept private patients from the Haines community, and many were able to live entirely on their fees, banking all of their paychecks for their military tour of duty. The Alaska Indian Arts' skill center is open to the public free, weekdays.

Photos, courtesy of Sheldon Museum and Cultural Center and Hotel Halsingland.

Produced and printed by the Haines Visitor Bureau with assistance from the Alaska Division of Tourism.

Right: Panorama from water tower.



7 As you continue toward the mountains, you pass a house with a totem pole on one side and a cannon on the other. Now a private residence, this was the Fort's headquarters building and post office. The cannon was cast in 1861

and is one of the world's first breech-loading naval guns, designed to use shell casings and to be fired from the rear. Craftspeople of Alaska Indian Arts carved the totem pole, which represents the eagle, spirit figure and bear.

8 When you reach the top, left hand corner of the Parade Ground, pause and view the six acre area where troops drilled and where morning muster and evening taps were sounded. An historical marker stands near the flag pole. Several newer buildings stand

on the Parade Ground, including a replica of a Chilkat Tribal House, decorated with carvings made at Alaska Indian Arts. Here the Chilkat Dancers Storytelling Theater performs. Another building, now housing an art gallery, is a replica of a traditional Alaska trapper's cabin.



Band on 4th, 1936.

9 Along the top of the hill was Officers' Row. Here the Fort's captains and lieutenants and their families lived. The first building on the left, one of the Fort's two single family homes, was the chief surgeon's residence. The duplexes contained over 4,000 square feet of living space, including a full stone basement and large attic. Most of the buildings are roofed with an asbestos and cement composite tile, made to resemble slate.

10 At the end of the walk is a duplex that served as a Bachelor Officers' Quarters. It is now part of the Hotel Halsingland.

11 The central hotel building was the Captain's Quarters.

12 The main building of the Halsingland originally was the Commanding Officer's quarters. It was here that Elinor Dusenbury wrote the music to the "Alaska Flag Song" as she prepared to leave Alaska.

13 As you turn and walk down the hill you will see the fire hall that housed a LaFrance soda pumper. In winter the soldiers used a knotted rope to pull it by hand over the boardwalks.

14 The Guard House had four cells and a duty room. The guard's duties included raising and lowering the flag each day and firing the morning and evening salute guns. While in custody, prisoners were required to haul coal and freight from the dock uphill to the Fort.

15 As you reach the bottom of the Parade Ground, first turn right and then make the first left, turning downhill. The large barracks building on your right housed half the Fort's enlisted men.

16 The Post Exchange is the large building on your left. Formerly a gymnasium and movie house, it also contained a library, barbershop, reading room, soda fountain, store and bowling alley. The soldiers kept a pet bear, dubbed "Three Per" - short for three percent beer - who would beg ice cream cones here if he could not get beer.

17 The red building farther down the hillside on the right was the mule stable. In summer, the mules pulled wagons, in winter, sleds.

This concludes your walking tour of the Fort William H. Seward Historic District. The community of Haines is proud of its history and heritage and urges you also to visit the Sheldon Museum and Cultural Center at Main and Front Streets, open daily in the summer, and for more limited hours in the winter months. There you will find artifacts and mementos of the Fort, the Gold Rush and pioneer days, as well as beautiful examples of Native artwork. The Museum's bookstore offers a fine selection of Alaska literature.



A HISTORY WALKING TOUR



FORT WILLIAM H. SEWARD

HAINES, ALASKA

IN HONOR OF WILLIAM H. SEWARD

The Klondike

gold Rush was winding down but southeast Alaska's frontier was still wild and wide open in 1901. That year, the continuing United States-Canadian border dispute prompted the U.S. government to establish a military presence at the missionary settlement of Haines.

Haines was founded in 1881 by the Presbyterian Church at the invitation of the local Tlingit Indians. When the church's Home Mission Board deeded 100 acres of its property to the government for the site of an army fort, the community saw its character transformed. From that time onward, the development of the town and the Fort were intertwined.

Named in honor of William H. Seward, the U.S. Secretary of State who arranged the purchase of Alaska from Russia, Fort Seward was truly a frontier outpost. Its construction required extraordinary efforts. Work began in 1903, when

“There is no place like Alaska and Chilkoot Barracks,
and I am mighty glad to get back again.”



For some recruits, this was their first adventure on skis.

men, using horses, mules and oxen, began clearing the forested land by hand. A stationary steam engine was used to drive the pilings for the Fort's deep water dock.

The Fort buildings, including the shops for carpenters and blacksmith and the mule barn and carriage sheds, arrived by ship in pieces and were assembled on foundations laboriously excavated by men using picks and shovels, aided by a one-man, one-horse-drawn fresno scraper. The Officers' Quarters on the hill surrounded the six acre Parade Ground. They were constructed of

pre-cut fir, white pine and redwood, with ornate Victorian fireplaces, doors, windows and cabinets.

While the Fort was equipped with central heating - coal or wood fire boilers provided steam to cast iron radiators in every room - lighting was by kerosene lamps until Fort Seward was electrified in the early 1920's. A water tower at the top of the hill served the Fort. It was filled with water pumped from a reservoir at the lower end of the Fort.

PRACTICE, PLOW, PARADE

Two infantry

companies, using mules for transport, were posted at Fort Seward. The complement of soldiers reached a high of 241 enlisted men and 14 officers in the 1920s. In that era the Fort was renamed Chilkoot Barracks to avoid confusion with the town of Seward. By the 1930s, the Fort's force had dwindled to 100 men, still using mules for hauling and transport.

Its remoteness and primitive environment classified Ft. Seward as a foreign duty post for the U.S. Army. Soldiers earned double credit for each year served there, but the duty was not considered difficult. The main guard duty was a fire watch. Occasionally the troops were marched up the Chilkat Valley. Unlike other infantry companies stationed in Alaska, the Ft. Seward soldiers did not have field assignments as did the engineers who built bridges and roads in other parts of the Territory.

A good part of the year's work at the Fort involved coping with cold weather and snow. In the early years before snow plows, a big horse or mule-drawn roller was used to pack down the heavy snow on the main road. The men shoveled snow to keep the Parade Ground sidewalk cleared for the two-wheeled American LaFrance model fire hose cart that was pulled by six soldiers.

Ft. Seward soldiers marched on snowshoes or skis during weekly winter inspections. The townspeople were amused by the sight of new recruits struggling to master the use of their firearms while drilling on snowshoes or skis.

The soldiers' lifestyles varied with their ranks. The commanding officer and chief surgeon occupied larger, single family homes, and each officer, for a nominal monthly sum, could have an enlisted man serve as his orderly or "striker." While they were scornfully called "dog robbers" because they took their meals with

“Even among men with the most modern arms,
time is the hardest thing to kill.”



Home sweet home at Chilkoot Barracks, 1914 circa

the officer's family and supposedly had to rob the dog's dish for decent food, the strikers' duties had the benefit of exempting them from standing guard duty or doing KP.

A continuing challenge was boredom. "Even among men with the most modern arms, time is the hardest thing to kill," went the 1907 observation of a post newspaper writer in "The Musher."

The Ft. Seward soldiers worked to create diversions; they went hunting, fishing and hiking in off duty hours. Their social lives included weekly dances and basketball games that brought the people of the

town together with the men of the Fort. In winter, dances would find local girls outnumbered by soldiers almost six to one. In summer, the arrival of a steamship was the occasion for a dance, bringing the luxury of live orchestra music and, among the female passengers, new dancing partners. Some of Ft. Seward's men found their hearts captured by this unique community, and after their tours of duty ended, they married Haines girls and stayed.

"There is no place like Alaska and Chilkoot Barracks, and I am mighty glad to get back again," said Sgt. Sandy Gilbery in 1926.

FORT WILLIAM H. SEWARD'S IMPORTANCE FADES

In World Wars I and II, the Fort was a training base for Alaska recruits. During the Second World War it was a rest and recreation center for troops who served in the North Pacific Theater. At the end of the War, it was declared surplus property. When the Fort was decommissioned, the Army, remembering its own, not only removed its equipment, it also relocated the entire Ft. Seward cemetery to a military burial ground at Sitka.

The closure of Ft. Seward was a drastic blow to Haines' economy. After 42 years of catering to business from the Army post, how would Haines survive?

VETERANS BUY FORT, BUILD AN ALASKAN DREAM

The answer to the future of the old fort came from five World War II veterans and their families who had a dream. They bought the surplus 85 buildings and 400 acres, sight unseen. What had been founded as Fort Seward and known for years as the Chilkoot Barracks thus became Port Chilkoot in 1947.

At first the sourdoughs of Haines wondered if these "cheechakos" (newcomers to Alaska), most of whom were college-educated Easterners, would survive in the rugged North. But those war veterans were determined to succeed in establishing a planned community at the Fort, even though this presented a formidable challenge in the new, postwar economy.

Said Carl Heinmiller, a founder of Port Chilkoot: "Me? I've got a chance to start something in the greatest land our country owns. I think I've got the long end of the stick."

One of the veterans gave up after a year, but the others continued to try to bring new life to the old Fort, trying everything from a salmon smokehouse to a furniture making plant.

From the original post-war dream of operating small businesses within a cooperative at the Fort, those energetic veterans and their families succeeded in establishing themselves in the community. Some of them and their descendants still live at the Fort. These contemporary pioneers made many contributions to modern-day Alaska, including the beginnings of what is now the state ferry system, and Haines' art galleries and theater, its Hotel Halsingland and Alaska Indian Arts.

Then in 1970, by popular vote, Port Chilkoot became part of the City of Haines, and two years later it was designated a national historic site and officially renamed "Fort William H. Seward."

Daily drill
on the Parade
Ground.



Supply ship
S.S. Humboldt
secure at dock,
1916.

Soapsuds Alley
about 1913.



Officers Row.
The shingle roofs
were later replaced
with composite
tiles.



Shoveling
snow.

